

PFC Shannon Lee



**MSG Howard Mullen: G.I. Joe collector.**

*Today, Mullen's collection boasts 40 figures and it's still growing.*

ONE day in 1996, while surfing the Internet, **MSG Howard Mullen** — NCOIC for the Directorate of Training for the U.S. Army Garrison at Fort McPherson, Ga. — came across one of many sites dedicated to G.I. Joe.

A flood of childhood memories rushed in, Mullen said, and soon he began collecting the 12-inch movable action figure with lifelike features and accessories.

"Looking at that website transported me to a time when life was much simpler. I reflected on my childhood and remembered the days when I played with G.I. Joes," he said.

Mullen remembered being mesmerized by the G.I. Joe commercials, when the action figure was first introduced, and going to the toy store and staring at the figures, hoping he could talk his mom into buying one.

He got his first one, an action marine, in 1964. As his collection grew, he'd set up an army of G.I. Joes in his backyard, Mullen said.

Toy soldiers take some wear and tear over time, and often kids lose them, or they get thrown away. Mullen's G.I. Joes suffered similar fates. But today, he has a whole new collection.

"About three years ago I found the ultimate G.I. Joe, a special forces Green Beret in mint condition." Today, Mullen's collection boasts 40 figures — primarily special operations-types, such as Vietnam-era special forces, rangers, Navy seals, Marine force recon and airborne G.I. Joes — and it's still growing.

"When my wife asks me what I want for my birthday

or Christmas, she knows it has to be a G.I. Joe," Mullen said.

"Their accessories and uniforms make each one unique," Mullen said. And their authenticity impresses him. "The soldiers look so much like real soldiers."

Using military manuals, museum references and history books, Mullen has been able to recreate historic scenes for his G.I. Joe displays.

"I do what is called 'kit bashing', where I take an accessory from one action figure and put it with another in order to make historically correct scenes," Mullen said. "I'm currently working on a representation of the Delta Force in Somalia."

Mullen collects the action figures for their historical value and influence on his life. "They, and John Wayne's movie 'The Green Berets,' played a significant part in my decision to become a soldier," he said.

A 23-year Army veteran, Mullen has served in all three ranger battalions, has been a ranger instructor and has co-authored the U.S. Army Combatives Manual. — *PFC Shannon Lee, Fort McPherson U.S. Army Garrison Public Affairs Office*

**SFC Mark Giampietro** and **CPT Todd Browning** had just finished discharging ships in Sydney, Australia, as part of exercise Crocodile '99 when the crisis in East Timor broke.

Military officials had no reliable seaport survey of the country, so the two Military Traffic Management Command soldiers got the mission to conduct port surveys of Karabela, Dili and other potential ports. They would be among the first U.S. service members to arrive in the beleaguered country.

Before departing they drew full combat gear, weapons and other essential items. The men also received inoculations and malaria pills. Among the potential threats they'd face were encephalitis and dengue fever.

Giampietro, first sergeant of the 599th Transportation Group at Wheeler Army Air Field, Hawaii, and Browning, operations officer from the 836th Trans. Bn. in Yokohama, Japan, joined two Military Sealift Command sailors.

They were part of International Forces East Timor, INTERFET, which assembled in Darwin, Australia, and arrived at the port of Karabela via UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, with New Zealand special forces soldiers, on Sept. 26. The In-

**CPT Todd Browning (right) takes pier measurements at the port in Karabela, East Timor.**



donesian army was evacuating East Timor as anti-independence militias forced people from their homes and killed thousands, according to fleeing refugees.

Six days earlier Australia had spearheaded military and humanitarian aid to East Timor. Other nations, including the United States, had pledged assistance.

The survey team faced its first challenge moments after initiating a port survey. "About 15 local nationals showed up with clubs and machetes," Giampietro said.

"Our security personnel, three New Zealand soldiers, walked up to them, got in their faces and marched them out of the port area at gunpoint. Then we resumed our survey," said Giampietro, praising the New Zealanders' force-protection efforts. "They're professional soldiers in every sense of the word. We trusted them with our lives."

Back in Darwin, the port-assessment team members delivered the first assessment of Karabela. They briefed Brig. Gen. John Castellaw, the deputy commander of the Third Marine Expeditionary Force from Okinawa.

"He told us we had done a great job and reminded us that our survey was the only first-hand intelligence they had of Karabela," said Giampietro. "Information we provided would help not only U.S. forces, but those from other countries participating in INTERFET."

Mission complete, Giampietro and Downing moved on to another assignment, a port survey of Dili on Oct. 1. "On the way there, we passed smoldering buildings and saw frightened people running around everywhere," said Giampietro. As at the port of Karabela, some East Timor natives were hostile.

"They walked right up to us, staring hard and sniffing," Giampietro said. "The Australians got into a stand-off with them until they backed down and let us get on with our work. When we did, we could hear shots being fired and saw smoke rising in the distance." The MTMC soldiers were able to return to Darwin the same night.

"When we got back to our hotel, I thought it strange

to see people engaged in normal everyday activities after seeing a country torn apart," said Giampietro. "The experience in East Timor made me realize how valuable life is and how lucky we are to be Americans." — 599th Trans. Group PAO

**M**ICHAEL McMahan, a 10-year-old boy with a brain tumor, realized a dream, thanks to the Army.



**Michael McMahan talks Army with LTC Raymond Hilliard (left) and CPT Cameron Mitchell.**

Kansas City, Mo., Recruiting Battalion commander LTC Raymond S. Hilliard "inducted" Michael into the Army at Anthony Elementary School, in Leavenworth, Kan., in front of his classmates and three siblings.

Michael's dream from early childhood was to join the Army someday, just like his uncle, 1SG Gilbert Herra, who is currently assigned to Fort Riley, Kan.

Due to Michael's illness, Hilliard decided to waive the minimum age requirement for enlistment and grant the young boy's wish.

Some 300 students, eager to see what Army officers were doing at their school, filled the gym. Then the principal, Debbie Lauxman, called Michael to come to the front of the crowd, and his grandfather pushed Michael's wheelchair forward.

Lauxman told the boy that President Bill Clinton and his wife had a special gift for him. Then, Liberty Recruiting Company commander CPT Cameron Mitchell presented the Clintons' basket of gifts. It included a baseball cap, a deck of cards, Hillary Clinton's children's book, Air Force One M&Ms, a picture of the president's cat and White House stationery.

Michael looked up at Mitchell and whispered, "This is great."

Then Hilliard introduced himself to the audience and told Michael he would be honored to serve with such a brave young man.

"Raise your right hand and repeat after me," Hilliard told him. Following the oath of enlistment, Hilliard presented him with Army items including a set of BDUs, dog tags, an I.D. card, T-shirt, a delayed-entry packet, poster and key chain.

Michael disappeared for a few minutes. When he returned, wearing his Army garb, he was treated to a Humvee ride courtesy of the Army Reserve's 842nd Quartermaster Co. from Kansas City, Kan.

Michael was beaming as he sat in the front seat and played with the radio, his mother said. "It's a day he will never forget." — MAJ Debra L. Stewart, U.S. Army Recruiting Battalion, Kansas City

*Michael's dream from early childhood was to join the Army someday, just like his uncle, 1SG Gilbert Herra.*

